



An Education for All Seasons of

Life

BY SUSAN REESE

“Learning is what most adults will do for a living in the 21st century,” author and humorist S.J.

Perelman says with what is probably a good deal of accuracy. With rapid-fire changes in technology and innovative new ideas emerging constantly, achieving success in today’s global workplace means making a commitment to the philosophy of lifelong learning. Career and technical education (CTE) programs that provide 21st century skills may begin in secondary education, but they are not educating just high school students. Many adults are benefiting from these programs, often at one of our nation’s community colleges. According to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), in the fall of 2007, 11.8 million students were enrolled at 1,173 community colleges in the United States. That includes both full-time and part-time, and credit and non-credit students.

Among those who have recognized the significant contribution community colleges have made to expand educational opportunities is Federal Reserve Chair-

man Ben Bernanke. According to Bernanke, “Attendance at one of these institutions is associated with higher wages, even if a degree isn’t completed. Evidence suggests that each year of credit at a community college is worth almost as much, in terms of increased earning potential, as a year at a four-year college.”

In the November 2009 issue of *Governing* magazine, an article by Ventura, California, Mayor William Fulton is titled, “Community Colleges: Today’s Best Source for Job Training?” His answer to that question includes this: “The path

to economic security, especially for the working class and children of immigrants, leads to a community college, where you can get a combination of academic education and technical training—life skills and job skills.” Fulton doesn’t see that path as just for the working class and immigrant families, however. “Academic learning still matters, but it’s not enough,” he notes. “To get a good job, a lot of people need a good technical education as well. They need to have practical, problem-solving knowledge that they can put to use in the real world.”

The reality is that CTE programs at today's community colleges are training not only economically disadvantaged young people, but working professionals as well.

Access for All

The Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) has recognized the Community College of Denver (CCD) as a best practice example in adult education, citing its success in narrowing a serious attainment gap. CCD is Colorado's most ethnically and racially diverse higher education institution, with 46 percent minority enrollment (minority data reported from Student Union Record Data System enrollment file, Fall 2009 End of Term), primarily Hispanic and African-American.

CCD is dedicated to expanding access in particular for underserved, first-generation and minority students. In 1990, it set out to eliminate gaps in outcomes between students of color and their white peers. It improved recruitment and outreach, developmental education, advising and student support systems targeted to first-generation college-goers and students who arrive underprepared to succeed in college.

In 2004, CCD received the MetLife and Jobs for the Future Community College Excellence award. In its December 2009 report, "Strong Students, Strong Workers: Models for Student Success through Workforce Development and Community College Partnerships," the Center for American Progress cited CCD because of several accelerated programs the school offers, among them Fast Start, a program for students whose skills and test scores are not strong enough for college-level coursework.

CCD describes Fast Start as "a holistic approach to developmental education." It is designed to accelerate students through multiple semesters of developmental coursework enabling them to take two courses in the time usually allowed for one, while still receiving two grades.

Students also have the opportunity to participate concurrently in short-term career exploration in their area of interest through the career planning student experience component. The program has a learning community approach with an hour study group per week with peers, as well as staff and instructor support to help the students complete the program successfully and possibly go on to another level of education.

The report also discusses the CCD Essential Skills Program, which began as a welfare-to-work program and includes basic adult education, English as a Second Language (ESL) and GED instruction. These skills are taught in the context of Career Clusters that include business, early childhood education, and information technology.

Innovations geared toward student success have continued. In July 2010, CCD purchased the first Virtual Environment Radiation Therapy Training (VERT) machine to be sold in the United States. This virtual environment allows students to do their learning in a simulated hospital radiotherapy treatment room prior to being in a clinical setting with real patients. The system went live in August 2010, and has positioned CCD students to be almost a month ahead in their learning compared to students without this technological advantage.

CCD President Karen Bleeker states in her welcome message on the school's Web site that, "We are proud to offer a college experience that is affordable and accessible—one that celebrates learning, diversity, friendship and cooperation," and she concludes, "At Community College of Denver, opportunity is everything."

CTE for Career Advancement

Community colleges are often the gateway to postsecondary education and training for young adults, but the benefits offered by community colleges are not limited to individuals who are just entering the workplace. Working professionals are also

finding these schools to be great resources for the training necessary to remain current in their industry, and even for acquiring the skills and certifications to move into managerial positions.

Portland Community College (PCC), which is the largest institution of higher learning in Oregon, serves more than 1 million college-age residents in a five-county area of the state. As PCC District President Preston Pulliams notes, "Wherever you're coming from and wherever you're going in life, PCC probably has the classes and the programs to get you there." That seems to be an accurate description, since PCC's programs range from adult basic skills and pre-college programs to help students complete their GEDs, improve their English skills or prepare for college, to university transfer programs and continuing education designed to help adults advance their careers with additional professional training.

PCC's Management and Supervisory Development Department offers a program designed to help individuals who want to advance within their organizations, make themselves more marketable, prepare for a career change, or enhance their professional skills. The adults enrolled in this training may earn an Employment Skills Training Certificate, or even an Associate of Applied Science Degree in Management and Supervisory Development.

The Employment Skills Training Certificate is a state-approved program with 18-credit-hour certificates available in human resource management, leadership, customer service, management and supervisory development, project management, conflict management, and change/innovation management. The associate degree program requires a minimum of 90 credit hours, with 45 of those hours being management/supervisory development courses.

Roane State Community College, which has nine locations across East Tennessee, offers a Contemporary Manage-

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE OF DENVER



▲ The Community College of Denver was recognized by ACTE for its best practices in adult education.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ROANE STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE



▲ The Contemporary Management Program at Roane State Community College is designed for working adults.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ROANE STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE



▲ Business administration is part of the Roane State Community College program.

ment Program with reduced in-class time designed specifically for full-time working adults to earn an Associate of Applied Science degree. Classes meet one night a week for five weeks, and there is an additional eight-hour summary session. The program offers different formats that students may choose to complete their management classes, including traditional, video conferencing and hybrid. In the traditional format, classes meet face-to-face one night a week for five weeks, and there is an additional eight-hour summary session. The video classes also meet one night a week for five weeks, but via video conferencing. In the hybrid format, classes meet twice face-to-face while completing most of the work via the Internet.

The program includes 24 credit hours of management courses, 21 credit hours of general education courses, and 15 credit hours of electives. It is also possible, through a portfolio process, for students to earn credit toward a degree for prior college-level learning, through cooperative work experience or for their previous work experience.

For working students in East Tennessee, the Roane State Contemporary Management Program offers the education and credentials to help them advance their careers, move into a management position, or even start their own businesses.

Education for All Ages

Another school recognized by ACTE for best practices in adult education is Indian River State College (IRSC) in Ft. Pierce, Florida, which was until recently known as Indian River Community College. A recipient of the 2006 Community College Excellence Award presented by Jobs for the Future and MetLife, and the 2008 Florida Chancellor's Award for Workforce Development for Adult Education/Career Pathways, IRSC offers more than 150 programs leading to bachelor's degrees, associate degrees, applied technology diplomas and technical certificates at its five campuses. The college is the region's state-designated career and technical center. Its mission statement emphasizes a 50-year commitment to "advancing the

educational, cultural, career training, workforce and economic development of its surrounding area."

When ACTE acknowledged IRSC with best practice recognition, among the accomplishments cited were the college's track record as one of the top high school diploma-granting institutions on Florida's Research Coast, and one of the state's largest providers of adult education due in part to its investment in adult education for the growing minority and immigrant population. The free adult education classes include GED review and adult high school classes, vocational classes, civics and citizenship, and English language learning.

IRSC adult education is focused on helping students successfully continue their education beyond high school. Each year, more than 1,000 students begin postsecondary classes while still enrolled in adult education. In fact, about 25 percent of the college's associate degree graduates began as IRSC adult education students. The college's Adult Education Career Pathways program offers seven



▲ Michael Harding earned his GED and completed the Law Enforcement Academy at Indian River State College (IRSC), and now works for the Ft. Pierce, Florida, Police Department.

▲ Rosie Santos Kolp, who completed the IRSC Certified Nursing Assistant program while enrolled in ESL and GED, is now pursuing her LPN credential.

tracks: business, advanced technology, health science, public safety, education, industrial education, and STEM. Because of the program's success, IRSC is working directly with the Florida Department of Education, leading a statewide team to develop a career pathways adult education system for the state.

"The future of Florida's adult education lies in helping students enter postsecondary programs that develop technical skills for skilled jobs," says IRSC Dean of Developmental Education Anthony Iacono. Following the same philosophy, IRSC is working actively with the U.S. Department of Education to develop career pathways for adult education across the nation.

IRSC's name change reflects the transition to offering bachelor's degree programs, and last month, the school launched three new ones—in biology, digital media and human services. They were selected based on a needs assessment of student interest, employer demand for graduates, economic development trends, projected job growth, and an in-depth

analysis of the college's resources.

Adult education is an important aspect of state and local economic development because it helps prepare a skilled workforce to attract and retain businesses and industries that support the local economy. However, it must also be responsive to changing needs, and that's what schools such as IRSC are doing by adding programs that meet critical workforce needs. IRSC President Edwin R. Massey notes, "As our region continues to evolve into the Research Coast, these new bachelor's degree programs will create a pipeline of highly skilled employees for the new types of knowledge-based jobs that are being attracted to our area. With our state economy beginning to strengthen and diversify, it is very important that residents of our region have access to higher education which will prepare them for 21st century careers."

Adult education is too often thought of as just remedial education, and it does play an important role in providing young adults with the necessary life and career skills they need, but it is so much more—

especially when CTE is included. All across the country—and at community colleges in particular—CTE is addressing the needs of adult students of all ages. It truly is an education for all seasons. **I**

Explore More

For more information about the schools featured in this article, visit these Web sites.

Community College of Denver
www.ccd.edu

Indian River State College
www.irsc.edu

Portland Community College
www.pcc.edu

Roane State Community College
www.roanestate.edu

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